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Through sculpture, drawing, and performance, my work explores the material and conceptual specificities of space. This paper seeks to draw a thread through the primary interests of my artistic practice: process based sculptural work and the creative analysis of land use. I am interested in the ways in which object material and physical elements within the landscape can collaborate through the creative process to uncover stories of a place and its history.

A WILD GARDEN APPROACH

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

A WILD GARDEN APPROACH

Through sculpture, drawing, and performance, my work explores the material and conceptual specificities of space. This paper seeks to draw a thread through the primary interests of my artistic practice: process based sculptural work and the creative analysis of land use. I am interested in the ways in which abject material and physical elements within the landscape can collaborate through the creative process to uncover stories of a place and its history. Between urban patterned utility marks, carefully planted ornamental annuals, and mounds of rubbish, I seek potential relationships between material culture and landscape in order to procure insight into what we hold important and what we choose to ignore and toss away. My thesis work investigates the historical and future geographic parameters of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) as a place that hosts multiple relationships of economic, social, and political conditions. By creating work that mines archives, oral and lived histories to inform the present, I seek to create an open-ended narrative of how the detritus of place, in concert with the ways the land is used, have a significant role in the formation of social identity, cultural expectations, and the development of collective memory.

Personal histories of objects and their relationship to place

I cultivated an intense interest in the relationship of objects and significance of place at a very early age. Growing up in the rural foothills of North Carolina, I spent much of my time exploring my father's eccentric collection of 19th century log cabin

architecture and farm tools. In the early 80's, he cleared a patch of brambles by the creek, purchased three dilapidated cabins and reassembled them alongside a large stand of poplars. After the cabins were roofed with new aluminum, he filled their tiny rooms with antique farm tools (wooden reapers, pick axes, corn grinders, etc.) and planted cottage gardens to complete his fantastical homage to early American homesteading. I was observant of the shapes, textures, and joining methods in these archaic tools and imagined novel uses for them. In the case of my father's collection, the object as artifact serves as a tactile representation of the development and settlement of American landscape. My father's creation of a miniature pioneer village in the "wilderness" of western North Carolina romanticizes the legacy of 'Manifest Destiny' and its influence on western expansion and the advance of capitalism.

The exploration of southern landscape and its legacy of troubled history was also a significant part of my childhood experience. On a two-week summer vacation in 1990, my family loaded our Ford Taurus station wagon on an epic journey to visit the Niagara Falls by way of visiting several Civil War battle sites between North Carolina and New York. My father would split my brother and I into representatives along the Northern and Southern divide, and we'd loosely reenact battle scenes according to the informational literature displayed on site. The experience of trying on our 'Yankee' and 'Confederate' identities in reaction to landscape was a formative exercise in the analysis and codification of place. Phenomena within the landscape (boulders, hills, fields, lines of trees, and ravines) developed mythical significance due to the number of lives lost in battle. As we traveled north, I tried to classify the differences and similarities in the rolling hills and fields of Lynchburg, Antietam, and Gettysburg. Regardless of its orientation to the Mason Dixon Line, a rock, otherwise a muted physical component of

the landscape was elevated to a historical artifact when sourced from a battlefield. A rock from Antietam became a physical manifestation of the screams of dying men and blasts of muskets and held more weight than a rock at a truck stop 5 miles away.

I am interested in the ways we assign value to benign phenomena in our daily existence. The theoretical readings of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff have helped me understand the ways in which objects, like people, have a social identity as they travel in and out of a commodity status. An object's value depends on a series of sociological determinants that include the period and culture in which the objects are realized and who has owned or experienced the object. The rock from Antietam assumed cultural or historic value on the evening of September 17, 1862, when it was a bystander to 23,110 deaths of Union and Confederate soldiers. Because of its contextual grounding in history and the subsequent identification as a salient relic of our nation's history, it automatically has an elevated status in the hierarchy of landscape phenomena.

In addition to the analysis of objects and phenomena sourced from landscape, I am interested in how dominant cultural forces assign value to land itself. Kopytoff's analysis of the ways in which the social trajectory correlates with assigned value of an object can be applied to the life of a landscape. Land is a medium unto itself that manifests value depending on its use, ownership, and potential development. In his essay, *Imperial Landscape*, W.T.J. Mitchell states,

landscape is a medium in the fullest sense of the word. It is a material "means" like language or paint, embedded in a tradition of cultural signification and communication, a body of symbolic forms capable of being invoked and reshaped to express meanings and values. As a medium for expressing value, landscape's structure is like that of money, functioning as a special sort of commodity that plays a unique symbolic role in the style of exchange-value.

- Mitchell, 1994, Page 14.

I research sites that are in a tenuous state and host various economic, social and political narratives as they are in flux between ownership and use. I am attracted to sites, and abject objects found in said landscapes, that are charged with the evidence of disruption. I look to the train trestle that carves the city into smaller geometries of color, ethnicities and class, or a small patch of grass hemmed in by the 4-lane highways that were constructed during Greensboro's urban renewal program of the mid 1960's as profound spaces with vibrant histories. Greensboro's urban landscape hosts physical evidence of capital expansion, racial and socio-economic segregation, and the collapse of the textile industry in North Carolina. In these geographic and political border zones, landscape is experienced in its most malleable and transitory states, amenable to change and real estate development as determined by industrial, institutional, and governmental interests.

My thesis work focuses the current and future geographic parameters of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) as a site that is embedded with socio-economic tensions. My research looks to the University's historical land use patterns to inform its current expansion into Glenwood, a neighborhood positioned south of UNCG's main campus. Glenwood is one of Greensboro's first planned neighborhoods, and is a traditionally diverse, working class neighborhood. UNCG's expansion into the neighborhood is a contentious topic among area residents and business owners. Currently, I reside in this neighborhood, but, as my residence is transitory, am able to reflect multiple viewpoints and reactions to the university's expansion. The sites I explore are political in nature, but I am not interested in positing overbearing political commentary through my practice. As an artist, my goal is to allow the work to speak for itself, providing space for the viewer to be present with the work,

as well as their own associations.

I utilize field research methodologies, such as photo documentation, collection of objects, and analysis of planting relationships, while physically engaging with the space. These combined methodologies help me develop a greater understanding of place in the present tense. The object objects that I gather from sites are collected and classified and subsequently undergo various processes of manipulation that refer to the physical context of its acquisition. In her key essay, *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva introduces the abject as a “jettisoned object, and yet the primer of culture” - that which is dispelled from society because of the fear of the “foreign or unknown” and its representation of the fragility of life. Kristeva further states, “It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, and order. What does not respect borders, positions, and rules? The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” (Kristeva, 4)

I select these samples, wood scraps from construction areas, bits of foil pounded in the pavement, pink survey flags, for their contextual grounding, formal qualities (color, texture, pliability), and their independent biographies that are determined by their function and location of collection. These materials are then manipulated, stitched and bound to create sculptural responses that respond to the sites of their collection.

Process based material investigation in combination with the repetition of physical gesture is a continuous thread in the history of my studio practice. Lynda Benglis, Merle Laderman Ukeles, and Louise Bourgeois are artists within the 20th century canon that I continually look to in their use of material transformation in combination with artistic manipulation as an extension of the body. Contemporary artists such as Richard Tuttle, Sarah Sze, Rachel Harrison, and Lois Weinberger provide

inspiration with concerns through their transformation of everyday materials in works provoke questions of material hierarchy.

Ornamental Gateway Displacement and *Mapping Manning*, projects completed in 2012-13, provide a contextual grounding for my thesis project, *Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland*. In these projects, I synthesize relationships of ornamental gardens, vernacular architecture, plant material to create sculptural installations that speak to my experience of the Glenwood neighborhood and its relationship to the historical, present and future expansion of UNCG.

CHAPTER II

PROJECTS

Displaced Ornamental Gateways

In *Displaced Ornamental Gateways*, completed in the fall of 2012, I transposed a decorative garden planted at the entry of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to a site of future institutional expansion at the border of the Glenwood neighborhood. In the summer of 2012, the University's facilities department installed an unusual gridded arrangement of ornamental chili peppers at the corner of Tate and Spring Garden Streets. Because of the plants' fiery mélange of red, orange, and yellow, and their implied function as a spicy foodstuff, the decorative bed demanded attention and commentary from pedestrians and drivers alike.

Later in the fall, the UNCG facilities department stripped the ornamental bed in order to plant frost resistant annuals for the winter season. After coordinating with UNCG facilities to obtain over 130 ornamental pepper plants, I created a variety of temporary planters for the plants, including white plastic buckets, painted cardboard flats, and modified milk containers. I then arranged the plants in a formal symmetrical design on the sidewalk along Lee Street. This site directly corresponds to the University's planned expansion into the historic Glenwood neighborhood. The planting arrangement was installed on an early Friday morning to ensure that commuters and residents viewed the garden as they started their day. Throughout the day, pedestrians and drivers would periodically take the plants from the formation, presumably to replant them in a domestic

setting. I would respond to the disruption of the plant formation by rearranging the remaining plants into a new symmetrical design. I photographed the arrangement before and after their repositioning, until all the plants were taken from the site. The documentation of the disappearance of the temporary garden constitutes the visual product of this project.

Throughout the planning and installation of this project, I did not anticipate that the pedestrians and drivers along Lee Street would take the plants from the site-specific installation. I was initially surprised by the disappearance of the garden formation, but later accepted the fact that they were no longer my property, as they were no longer those of the university. I found pleasure in knowing that these plants, close to the end of their lives, were reintroduced as a viable commodity to the residents of the Glenwood community. At the close of the day, I had the opportunity to speak with a gentleman who was taking the last flat of chili peppers. He stated that his cousin had notified him that someone had dropped off free plants for folks to take. I later found the chili peppers planted in his front lawn, on Silver Street, a few blocks from the site of the temporary garden.

My intention with *Displaced Ornamental Gateway* was to highlight the site of the University's expansion through the seemingly mute presence of ornamental plants. By manipulating their context, and to a degree their materiality, I established a pathway of exchange between the University, the pedestrians and drivers along Lee Street, and the residents of the Glenwood neighborhood. My goal in this work was to persuade the viewer to question the political context of every day materials; to consider the specificities and genesis of ornamental plants' relation to place and history; and the ways in which citizens and institutions employ materiality, unconsciously or knowingly,

as a signifier of social status.

Mapping Manning

While searching through the university's archives in the fall of 2012, I came across a large topographical map of the North Carolina Normal and Industrial School. Created in 1902 by Warren H. Manning, a protégé of the august landscape architect William Law Olmstead, this map acted as a master plan for the school's building boom in the early 20th century. In addition to beautifully illustrating the footprints of existing buildings, recreational areas, and land use designated for the function of the school, such as a hot house, hog pens, and dairy barns, the maps also listed existing natural landscape phenomena within the largely undeveloped 112 acres allotted to the university. Manning's map lists sections of rock outcroppings, natural springs and branches, bluffs, a morass, and illustrates the circumferential measurement and identification of each tree. Manning's design, like those of Olmstead, promoted the informal and naturalistic "wild garden" approach that emphasized pre-existing flora through a process of selective pruning to celebrate the smallest details in the landscape. Manning states,

I would have you give your thoughts to a new type of gardening wherein the Landscaper recognizes, first, the beauty of existing conditions and develops this beauty to the minutest detail by the elimination of material that is out of place in a development scheme by selective thinning, grubbing, and trimming, instead of by destroying all natural ground cover vegetation or modifying the contour, character, and water context of existing soil.

- Warren H. Manning, 1903.

Manning's master design focused on the development of Peabody Park, a large wooded area on the north side of campus. After his plan established over 5

miles of graded drives and walkways. The park was the primary site of the physical education for the female students, nature studies, and botany courses.

(Trelease, 11)

While searching through the archives, I also learned of the mandatory walking period assigned to young women in attendance at the State Normal and Industrial School (now UNCG). From 1892 into the early 1920's, students would have to spend about forty-five minutes every afternoon before dinner either walking or playing sports. (Trelease, 49) Manning's topographical map provided clues as to where the women may have walked through Peabody Park. My research focuses on the confluence of these two histories – the map and the walk – the juxtaposition of experiencing landscape via Manning's omniscient planning map in correlation with the physical engagement with the landscape itself. Using the century old map as a guide, I established a routine of taking daily walks, to identify the natural phenomena outlined in Manning's original map, and as a tool for the 'rediscovery' the present landscape.

The first phase of *Mapping Manning* focused on documenting my explorations of Peabody Park during the daily walks. I allowed myself to fully engage with the campus landscape in unexpected and new ways: using my body as a tool for the measurement of space, rolling down hills to explore the slope of the land, cleaning the rubbish from the creeks, and measuring the circumference of trees as Manning once did. This phase culminated in an installation at UNCG's Center for Creative Writing in the Arts in January 2013. I utilized the installation space as a field research outpost for my daily walks. The exhibition space featured a large copy of Manning's map, and all the tools needed for exploration and reflection of the walks: a shovel, gloves, measurement devices, surveying tape, and a small table accompanied with drawing tools. Throughout

the exhibition, I filled the space with drawings, photography, found objects and sculpture created in response my findings. I looked to the work and practices of contemporary artists Mark Dion and Andrea Zittel for their utilization of anthropological and scientific research methodologies during this process.

The second phase of the project focused on developing a body of site-specific sculpture and performance that correspond to the text on Manning's original map, and physical education requirements in the early years of the university. I selected several key words from the map: 'Bluff', 'Morass', and 'Dump', for their ability to host multiple meanings and interpretations. I realized each of these texts in divergent ways depending on their meanings and where they would be placed on campus. For *Bluff*, I created individual letterforms, in the style Manning's original font, using disparate materials such as small scraps of wood, plastic, paper towels, foam. These materials were bound and sealed using a water putty compound to unify their exterior surface. Each letter measures 3.5 feet in height and their width ranges from 5 to 32 inches. *Bluff* was temporarily installed along Gray Drive and the boundary of Peabody Park, which is relatively close to Manning's original notation on the map. I utilized fallen limbs and duct tape to prop the sculptural text at a 65-degree angle on a small hill covered in ivy.

Dump is a sculptural object created from a manipulated construction sign component (a 4 ft. tall orange 'x' shaped object hinged at its center) and is secured in plastic bags of concrete. The sign component was sourced from a demolition site from the Glenwood community. I covered the orange fiberglass 'x' shaped object with collaged mulberry paper and sumi ink in various opacities and tones. The surface treatment of *Dump* has the effect of a camouflaged marker when placed in landscape. The manipulated 'x' sculpture literally marks the spot of the school's former dumpsite.

Finally, the word 'Morass' was realized through rocks and rubbish found from a creek bed near the site of the original morass. The letters were comprised of granite, concrete, slate, a crusty sock, and mossy yogurt cup, and were arranged in the style of Manning's original font.

Expanding on my initial research of direct physical engagement with the landscape, I partnered with Danielle Kinne, an MFA candidate in UNCG's dance department, to create *Woman's Rove*, a site-specific dance performance. The performance was designed around a bunker, a golf course hazard that is a hole or depression in the ground filled with tall grass. The content of the choreography was in response to the role of physical education in the school's early history. Our process began with identifying overarching themes derived from my research. With Danielle's guidance, I developed gestural movement in response to the words 'women's place', 'labor', 'class', 'perimeter', and 'calisthenics'. After multiple rehearsals, Danielle and I collaboratively created a phrase of movement that combined intuitive gestural responses inspired by the text and the bunker setting.

The culmination of the *Mapping Manning* project was realized on April 8, 2013, when I facilitated a formal walk around the University's campus highlighting the early history of the State Normal and Industrial School. Using Manning's map as a guide, I installed the three dimensional texts, other site-specific sculptural pieces, and aired the debut of *Woman's Rove*, in and around Peabody Park. The sculptures were strategically placed along the walk to represent accounts of UNCG's early history. *Elisa Foshay and Danielle Kinne, both graduate students in the Department of Dance, performed Woman's Rove.* Over forty students and faculty from across disciplines joined the walk and were active participants in the recreation of the mandatory walk. I designed the

walk to be partially didactic while allowing the space for an unstructured informal stroll. I wanted to introduce the historical accounts that I had mined from the University's archives, while allowing the space for casual conversation between participants. For me, the formal walk linked the past and present, and was an opportunity to honor the students and educators who worked tirelessly to ensure that the women of North Carolina had access to a quality education in the early twentieth century.

Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland

wild gardening demands the highest intelligence and taste, close sympathy with nature, and that rare and precious quality—enjoyment of common and everyday things.

—Warren H. Manning, 1906

My thesis work, exhibited in May 2013 at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, is a sculptural installation that references my experience of the Glenwood neighborhood and its relationship to the historical, present and future expansion of UNCG. I applied the same multi-disciplinary research methodologies employed in the first phase of *Mapping Manning* to engage with the entrance to the Glenwood community, the site of UNCG's future expansion. The sites I investigated, homes and businesses on and around Lee Street, have now been demolished to make space for a mixed-use student village and recreation center. My thesis work synthesizes the temporal nature of these sites, the material culture of Glenwood, and the swift, surgical nature of the University's expansion.

On my daily walks to and from school for two months, I documented vernacular planting relationships, collected ephemera (a bed mat designed for a Dodge truck, large pieces of linoleum from a home on Lexington Street, exterior carpet squares from the Tile Shop), and photographed the façade of each building before their scheduled

demolition, and brought this information and residue into my studio to serve as source material for my thesis work.

Lexington Boxwood is a three-dimensional form that references the vernacular landscape design of Glenwood through the manipulation and arrangement of found objects sourced from homes destined for demolition. The sculpture, 6 feet 5 inches x 22 inches, is made of a long strip of linoleum shower tiling secured with wood and submerged in a small stand of concrete. The concrete is wrapped with a translucent plastic bag and tied with a knot. The surface of the tiling is coated in Vaseline, leaves of a boxwood plant, and sealed with clear plastic food wrap. The back of the sculpture features a large swirling tuft of newsprint painted Kelly green and charcoal grey.

Totemic in its construction and appearance, *Lexington Boxwood* combines the material culture of both Glenwood and University communities. The leaves of the boxwood, an ornamental plant that is often used as a dense visual buffer in landscape design, are sourced from the University's grounds to create a lively pattern on the face of the sculpture. At a distance, the boxwood pattern appears painted and applied on the surface of the plastic. Upon closer observation, the viewer realizes that the leaves are in a state of suspension. Using the boxwood leaves and object construction materials as a metaphor for the fugitive condition of landscape and living things, *Lexington Boxwood* is a temporal monument to the hybridity that develops as communities change.

Lexington Risk and Reward is a sculptural installation that combines elements of Glenwood's colloquial architecture and the paraphernalia of a construction zone. The bottom of the sculpture is a steel cage, measuring 20 x 37.5 x 20 inches. I created a woven structure around the cage by immersing strips of cotton muslin in plaster and overlapping each strip at two-inch intervals. Atop the steel and fiber base, a plaster

coated carpet square and cast concrete riser support a tall pillar, approximately 73 x 6 x 7 inches, made of wood, concrete, and linoleum, clay, and tar. The base of the pillar, a casually modeled, volleyball sized hunk of terracotta clay covered in tar and acrylic, appears too heavy for the delicate white weaving. To the right of the pillar and aligned with its center, an L-shaped steel armature protrudes from the wall about 12 inches. This piece of steel, wrapped in cotton thread and covered with wood putty compound, supports a ball of concrete suspended in woven plastic fruit packaging. The concrete sack is poised to drop and fall through a hold cut into the white woven fabric.

In *Lexington Risk and Reward*, I am referencing several streetscape motifs in Glenwood: telephone poles joining the concrete with pyramids of tacky tar, storage spaces under front porches where gardening tools are kept, a home slated for demolition whose walls and floors have been stripped. The tense physical dynamics of this sculpture reference the insecurity of land holdings and the brevity of a built structure's life.

CHAPTER III

REFLECTION

Evidently, there is sufficient material for a wild garden composed exclusively of American plants, and naturally such material is least expensive. But the wild garden spirit is essentially cosmopolitan... While the wild garden was created to make a place for plants outside the garden proper, it does not exclude the garden favorites... There are only three tests which a candidate for the wild garden must pass—hardiness, vigor and interest.

-Warren H. Manning, 1906

Manning's words resonate with me as I witness the changes, and to a degree act as an active participant, in the University's expansion into the Glenwood community.

Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland evaluates the very elements that the University chose to prune in the expansion process. My current research focuses on the specificities of what makes Glenwood a unique and special community. I find poetic potential in the landscape vernacular present in Glenwood's zones that are slated for institutional development. The visual legacy of a neighborhood extends beyond architecture, the flow of traffic, and public parks where folks gather. For me, it is the personal value systems that are expressed in the front lawns of domestic spaces: the painted white rocks that are strategically placed in a verdant green lawn, a cluster of yucca plants congregating by a phone pole, a tangle of cacti that brushes the curb. The potency of evocative landscapes lies within the subtle nuances and uneven amalgamations that develop over time with the contribution of multitude of individuals. As the University expands into the Glenwood neighborhood, the indigenous bluffs and

outcroppings of rocks will likely be eliminated. They are too small and insignificant for a fully realized institutional landscape. Through my work, I hope to honor humble spaces and materials through the documentation and creation of work. Life and landscape are continually in flux, it is my endeavor to encourage people to stop and notice the present.

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CATALOGUE OF IMAGES

1. *Displaced Ornamental Gateway*, Installation Image, 2012.
2. *Bluff*, Installation Image, 2013.
3. *Mapping Manning*, Performance, 2013.
4. *Mapping Manning, detail of Hot House*, Performance, 2013.
5. *A Woman's Rove*, Performance, 2013.
6. *Lexington Boxwood*, Installation Image, 2013.
7. *Lexington Boxwood, detail*, Installation Image, 2013.
8. *Lexington Risk and Reward*, Installation Image, 2013.
9. *Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, 2013.
10. *Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, 2013.



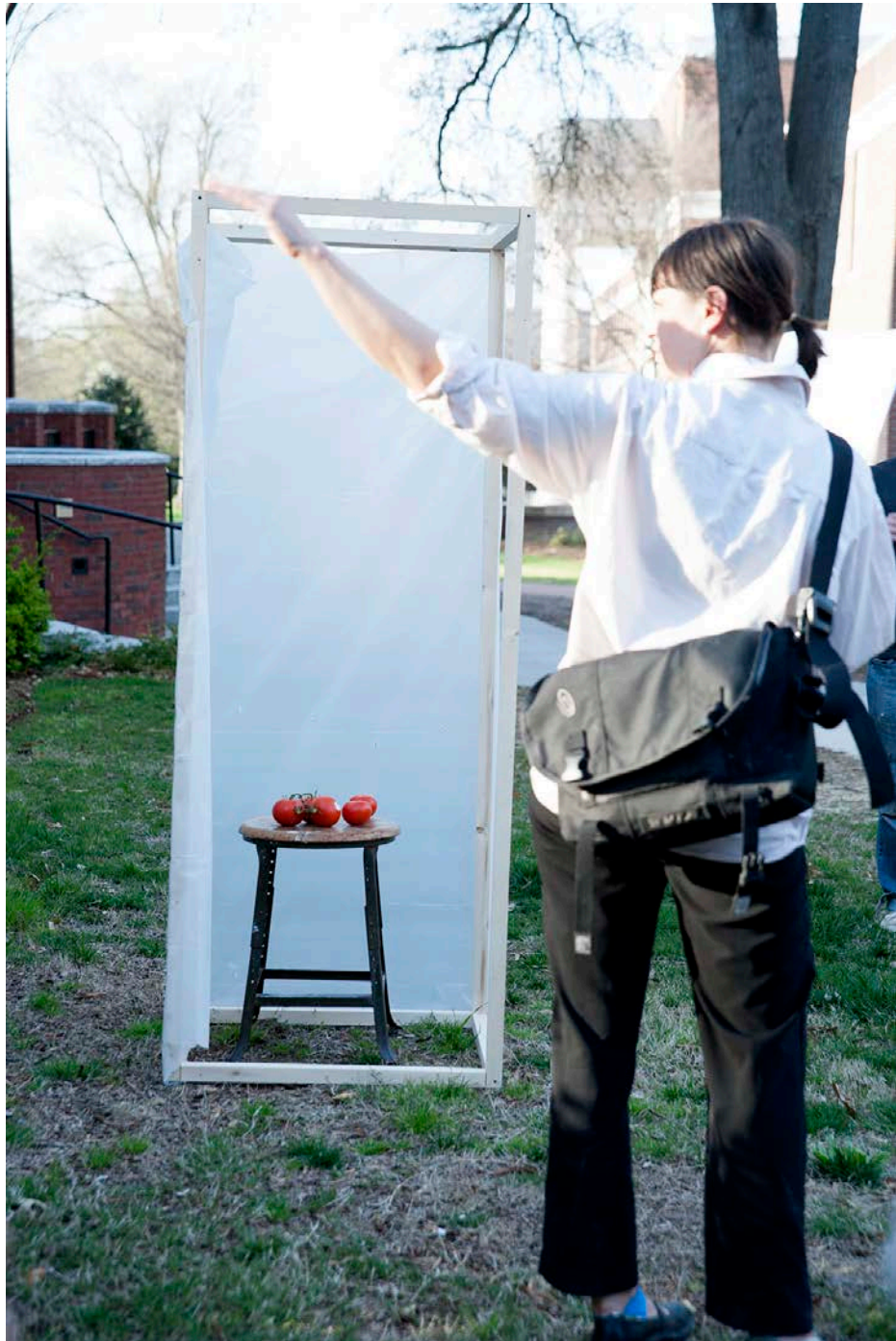
1. *Displaced Ornamental Gateway*, Installation Image, 2012.



2. *Bluff*, Installation Image, 2013.



3. *Mapping Manning*, Performance, 2013.



4. *Mapping Manning*, detail of *Hot House*, Performance, 2013.



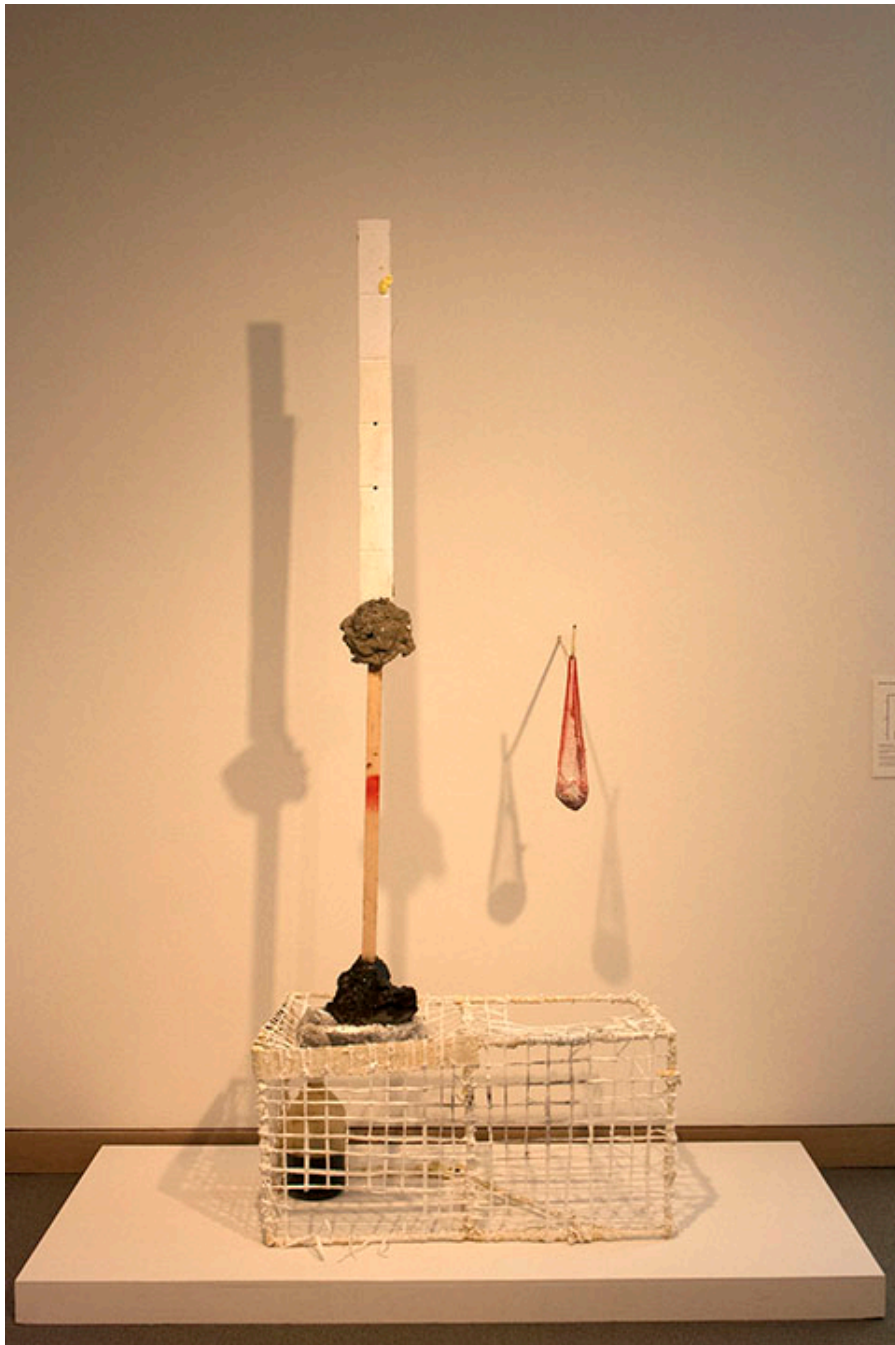
5. *A Woman's Rove*, Performance, 2013.



6. *Lexington Boxwood*, Installation Image, 2013.



7. *Lexington Boxwood, detail*, Installation Image, 2013.



8. *Lexington Risk and Reward*, Installation Image, 2013.



9. *Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, 2013.



10. *Constructed Bluffs and a Bottomland*, Weatherspoon Art Museum, 2013.